

EN

Japan in Colors

—
19th Century
Photographs

8 Nov
— 31 Dec 2023

MAU

MUSÉE DES ARTS
DÉCORATIFS



**Welcome to the Musée des Arts
Décoratifs and the exhibition
Japan in Colours.
19th Century Photographs.
We hope you enjoy your visit!**

The Musée des Arts Décoratifs holds around 700 hand-coloured albumen silver prints called Yokohama *shashin*, produced in Japan from the 1860's until the turn of the 20th century. Photography was already present in Japan when colour was introduced into this medium in 1863. In Yokohama, the entry port for Westerners, Italian photographer Felice Beato created a flourishing business model that paved the way for masters of the genre such as Ueno Hikoma, Uchida Kuichi, Raimund von Stillfried, Adolfo Farsari, Tamamura Kozaburo and Kusakabe Kimbei.

Despite *shashin* meaning “reproduction of the real”, these images often proved to be staged scenes with sets and actors. Landscapes, monuments, genre scenes and portraits conveyed a stereotyped vision that played a role in the development of Japanism, an enthusiasm that grew among artists and collectors after Japan's opening to the world in 1853 and that was favoured by the Meiji era after 1868. Yokohama *shashin* fed Western imaginations that were searching for a different country of their own, extra-occidental and unaffected by modern society. Consequently, these images are inseparable from the internationalisation phenomenon taking place at the time, marked by colonialism. Even though there was no territorial invasion, Western hegemony was undeniable: the colourists, as other employees at Beato or Farsari's workshops, lived difficult lives and were sometimes mistreated. Their independence, as such Kimbei who opened a studio of his own in 1880 after having worked as an assistant to Beato and Stillfried, was, thus, far from trivial.

The appeal of colour

The colouring of photographs is not specific to Japan, but it is where it reaches unprecedented popularity. Photographers hired collaborators to capture the images, to print them on albumen paper, to colour the prints and to fabricate plates and albums. Colours were obtained from natural pigments reduced to powder, diluted in animal glue and applied with a brush by a colourist. Each photograph is thus unique.

Colour played a part in the construction of clichés (a word with double meaning in French as both “snapshot” and “stereotype”) and in the depiction of bodies as objects. Bath scenes are numerous, stimulating desire by using colour to emphasise the complexion of the skin and the shapes of the body. Eroticism ran in parallel with Western hegemony in these images as in society, whether in black and white or in colour. Hugues Krafft – photographer, traveller and collector – has possibly paid the young woman he photographed naked from multiple angles. The absence of colour accentuates the sense of indignity and violence.





Discovering Japan through travels and exhibitions

Hugues Krafft went to Japan in 1882-1883, bearing his camera. There, he bought *Views and Costumes of China and Japan*, a portfolio by Austrian photographer Stillfried, later donated to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1914. At the same time, he captured each moment of his journey in black and white. He has chosen similar subjects to those of the Yokohama *shashin*: Mount Fuji, porters with carrying chairs, rickshaws, traditional games, geishas, etc.

Visiting international and universal exhibitions was an alternative way to explore the world without crossing borders. In 1867, Japan made a first roaring appearance in Paris, and continued to do so from then onwards. During the Universal Exhibition of 1889, Krafft exhibited his collection of figurines and *shashin* depicting Japanese trades – actors, fighters, messengers, carpenters – for the section devoted to the history of work and anthropology. Photographs and art objects complemented and dialogued to each other, both in their mission and in their conveyed image of Japan.

↑ Kusakabe Kimbei studio –
Cherry Avenue in Tokyo, circa 1871-1881
Color-enhanced albumen print
© Les Arts Décoratifs / Christophe Dellière

← Raimund von Stillfried studio –
Tattooed man, circa 1871-1881
Color-enhanced albumen print
© Les Arts Décoratifs / Christophe Dellière

Dissemination and uses of Yokohama *Shashin*

Photographs were occasionally sold individually, though the majority was assembled in portfolios fabricated by bookbinders, weavers and lacquerers. The multiplicity of trades involved ensured a variety of products, suited for all budgets and tastes. While in Japan these items could be purchased directly from photographers, they were also sold in Parisian boutiques such as Hayashi Tadamasā's, a client of Kimbei, or at Bing's and Le Printemps (that owned foreign subsidiaries in Yokohama).

Artists, craftspeople and decorators were given access to new inspiration sources thanks to the dissemination of these images and to the exhibitions and acquisitions made by libraries and museums. The Yokohama *shashin* became iconographic models thanks to the diversity of textiles and objects they portrayed.

Japanese clichés

Western tourist guides advised travellers to stop in a Japanese photographic studio, whether to start and prepare their trip or at the end to buy souvenir photographs. Regardless the fact of the emerging society's Westernisation – as shown by certain photographs of architecture, fashion and transportation – occidental people still favoured tradition. Picturesque views like the Mount Fuji, tea houses and streets lined with cherry trees were still the preferred subjects of western people. Consequently, *shashin* were more a representation of stereotypes than a reflection of reality, despite their use and reception being diverse, from tourist memories, art models, and anthropological objects.

Opening hours for the exhibition

Tuesday to Sunday from 11 am to 6 pm.

Lecture (in French only)

On Thursday 23 November 2023
from 6:30 pm to 8 pm

“Quand le Japon de Meiji se représente :

Photographies, estampes et livres
du musée des Arts décoratifs”

by Laure Haberschill
and Sébastien Quéquet

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#japonencouleurs

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the Musée des Arts Décoratifs,
the Musée Nissim de Camondo and
the Camondo school, the Ateliers
du Carrousel and the library.

Musée des Arts Décoratifs

107 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris

(The entrance is located
on the garden side)

Open Tuesday to Sunday
from 11 am to 6 pm

Late night Thursday 6 – 9 pm

Closed on Monday

Tickets on madparis.fr

Library

111 rue de Rivoli, 75001 Paris

Open Monday from 1 pm to 6 pm
and Tuesday to Thursday

from 10 am to 6 pm.

Information: bibliotheque@madparis.fr

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Kusakabe Kimbei studio —

Based on a negative of Raimund von Stillfried
or Kusakabe Kimbei

Girl in Heavy Storm, circa 1871-1912

Color-enhanced albumen print

© Les Arts Décoratifs / Christophe Dellièvre